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Linda Lumayag

University Malaysia Sarawak

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Essay

The Left-Behind Wife and Her Migrant Daughter

Linda A. Lumayag

Mama Peding was born 14 years before the Philippines was invaded by Japan in the mid-40s. When the Japanese came, Mama had to retreat to the jungle and eat cassava, banana, or sweet potatoes for survival. She recalled: “We were not supposed to cry or speak for fear that the Japanese army might hear us.” Silent whispers echoed through the lush forest vegetation as she and her uncle’s extended family treaded the narrow path to what she considered a road to nowhere. Yet, she revealed that she did not encounter any Japanese during the war. She only knew that they needed to evade the Japanese troops.

Mama’s mother, Susana, was a busy market seller and often, she and Honorata, her only sibling, were left at home. Susana would tie her and Honorata onto the house pillar so they would not go anywhere while she worked at the market. On one occasion, the girls were “nursed” by a lactating dog while their mother was away. No one babysat the sisters.

It was clear in those days that women must perform a balancing act between being a mother and a provider in order to keep the family afloat. Looking back on it, the fact that a mother must nurture her children on top of being able to provide for her family was no mean feat and was often glossed over and ignored.